

ADDRESS

DELIVERED IN THE CENTRAL PARK OF THE
CITY OF NEW YORK,

ON THE

TWENTY-SECOND DAY OF NOVEMBER, 1880,

ON

THE ERECTION AND PRESENTATION TO THE CITY OF NEW
YORK, BY JOHN C. HAMILTON, ESQ., OF THE
STATUE OF HIS FATHER,

ALEXANDER HAMILTON,

BY

32
BENJAMIN HARRIS BREWSTER,
OF PHILADELPHIA.



PHILADELPHIA:
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THE ceremony of unveiling the statue of Alexander Hamilton, the gift of John C. Hamilton, son of the statesman, to the city, took place the afternoon of November 22d, at Central Park, New York, in the presence of a large number of spectators. The Society of Cincinnati, St. Andrew's Society, Society of Engineers, St. Nicholas Society, and the Hamilton Literary Society, and other organizations were represented. At 2 o'clock President Stennan, of the Park Department, introduced Mr. John C. Hamilton, who made the presentation address. The statue was accepted on behalf of the city by Mayor Cooper. Hon. Benjamin Harris Brewster, of Philadelphia, delivered a discourse on the life and public services of Hamilton. His address was as follows:—

DISCOURSE.

V It is a difficult thing to do that which I have been deputed to do. The career of this wonderful man, whose statue you are now about to see unveiled, is full of conspicuous historical events. It is impossible to relate his life, or even to sketch an outline of his remarkable thoughts and deeds without repeating the history of our country. He took part in the first utterances of remonstrance and proposed resistance to the arbitrary acts of the Mother Country, and from that moment down to the fatal end of his great and useful life, he was personally associated with many of the prominent and triumphant results of that great Revolution, and when our independence was secured he was the father and author of the main principles of our National Constitution.

The Government was established chiefly by his efforts. As the Financial Minister of President Washington he organized the action and guided the Executive and other functionaries in the inauguration and administration of the first constitutional, democratic Republic that had ever existed. How, then, in the presence of all these startling and wonderful events, associated with the actings and doings of the great and good who were the actors, can I be able to compress the object of this discourse within convenient limits? It is hardly possible, and

yet I must attempt it. Those I address must help me, and with their memories supply all I am obliged to omit, and thus complete in their own minds that which will only be an imperfect and shadowy sketch.

The whole subject thus considered is majestic and colossal. The magnitude and grandeur of it overawes me—Alexander Hamilton is the glory of this nation. Jurists, statesmen, and philosophers of all nations will honor and reverence his name. He will be ranked with the greatest and wisest philosophers and lawgivers. Solon and Lycurgus and Aristotle “could have sat down with him and found in him a kindred spirit.” We are almost too near to him to fully take in the vast dimensions of his almost superhuman wisdom and genius. Time, like distance, can alone display to men the magnitude and height of his works and thoughts. “In general, he has been little weighed and appraised, and in points only—never as a whole. His due valuation he will first find in the diamond scales of posterity.” In this one of the greatest of cities he has ever been revered.

John C. Hamilton, a surviving son, to-day, with filial piety and gratitude for your veneration of his father, bestows upon you this just resemblance of him whose gentle care he lost at the threshold of his boyhood. This work is to give to you and to posterity some memorial of his presence and bearing, so that men hereafter may see what manner of man he was, to whom such honor is due and from whom we have received so much.

Let me tell you who he was. He was of a historic and noble race of men. His father was a Scot. His mother French. A happy mixture of blood, conferring qualities that were conspicuous in his whole career. He was born on the 11th of January, 1757, in Nevis, one of the smallest of the Leeward Islands, a possession of the British crown. Early in life he was left an orphan. His means were slender. Obeying the impulse of his nature, which is in the spirit of his people, in his boyhood he sought and obtained employment. It was not in his temper to eat the bread of idle dependence; occupation and usefulness were essential to his very existence. Dignity and independence were the laws of his being, and imparted

force and power to all that he did. When he was twelve years old he entered the counting-house of a merchant, and soon commanded the confidence of his employer, who, when absent, committed his whole affairs to his control.

In this, as in every pursuit he adopted, he displayed aptitude and industry. Incessant, continuous, conscientious labor was the rule of his life. It was soon plain to those about him and around him that he possessed a superior mind that needed and demanded an opportunity for instruction and learning to complete his education.

In 1772 he was sent to New York, and there he entered Kings College (now Columbia College), and while there he was the most diligent of students. In 1774, when he was but seventeen years old, a great meeting was held to protest against the policy and action of the British Government. After others had spoken, urged by his convictions and zeal for the cause of the country, he arose to speak, and by the magic of his words and the justice of his thoughts excited the wonder and applause of all.

This was followed by a series of articles written by him in defense of the country, the authorship of which being unknown was imputed to men of established reputation and ability. Those who will read them now will be amazed, as people were then, when they learned they were the production of a college boy. As I read them they startled me by their concise clearness of expression and precocious wisdom. I am almost tempted to cite here the passages I had marked; I can only ask you to read them, that you may be filled with the same sense of wonder that all have felt who have read them.

When remonstrance repelled ended in resistance, he at once sought and obtained a company of artillery; in command of this he served with skill and conspicuous courage. He was then but nineteen. He is thus described as he marched through Princeton: "This company was a model of discipline, At their head was a boy, and I wondered at his youth; but what was my surprise when, struck with his slight figure, he was pointed out to me as that Hamilton of whom we had always heard so much. He was a youth, a mere stripling, small, slender, almost delicate in frame, marching beside a

piece of artillery, with a cocked hat pulled down over his eyes, apparently lost in thought, with his hand resting on a cannon, and every now and then patting it as if it were a favorite horse or a pet plaything." At the head of this company he continued until March, 1777, when, by special request of Washington, he accepted a place on his staff as aid, with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. Transferred thus from the line of active service in the field, he took his stand close by the side of the General-in-Chief, and forthwith obtained and retained his entire confidence.

I shall not detail the multitude of important and critical affairs that were committed to him in the dark and dismal days of his military life. Affairs that relate to the regulation and disposition of the army and its commanders, to intercourse with foreign courts, to intercourse with Congress and other public authorities, and to and with individuals interested in and connected with the cause of the country. That can not be done here. The correspondence of Washington with all of these important persons, and on all of these serious subjects, was committed to him and executed by him, and as they are read they excite wonder at his prodigious knowledge and forecast. They would be pronounced the work of a great mind had they been written by a mature man; but when it is remembered that he began this service at the age of nineteen, and ended it when he was but twenty-two, we are filled with amazement. I can not recount them or even do more than mention them in a cursory way as I have done.

While thus in his youth two things were suggested by him that have since been accepted and applied both in this and in other countries, the public advantage of which all have experienced, and they were these: When commanding his artillery company, and but nineteen, by a letter to Congress he suggested the promotion from the lowest grade of service as the reward of merit, and as an incentive to brave deeds excited by high and honorable hopes. His suggestion was adopted. Again, when he was but twenty-two, in a letter to Colonel Laurens of South Carolina he proposed to raise battalions of negroes, pointing out how their very habits of servile obedience fitted them for subordination, and prepared them for

the duties of soldiers, and then he ended his suggestions by saying: "An essential part of the plan is to give them their freedom with their swords. This will secure their fidelity, animate their courage, and, I believe, will have a good influence upon those who remain by opening the way to emancipation. This circumstance, I confess, has no small weight in inducing me to wish the success of the project, for the dictates of humanity and wise policy equally interest me in favor of this unfortunate class of men." In 1781 he resigned from the staff and accepted a commission of Lieutenant-Colonel, and in the same year joined the army and obtained the command of a battalion of New York troops, which became a part of the advanced corps, and when the British forces entered Virginia he followed the army to Yorktown with his command, and then signalized himself by acts of daring personal courage, and took part in the memorable surrender of the Earl of Cornwallis. This closed his military life.

The war was soon ended, and he returned to civil life and pursuits. In this city he prosecuted the study of the law, was admitted to the bar, and at one step assumed the leadership in that profession. Independence had been secured, but with it came a host of dreadful evils. The whole social, commercial, and political order and economy of society was in confusion approaching anarchy. The currency was worthless and all standard measures of value had been destroyed. Debtors were penniless and creditors without remedy. The very foundations of society were shaken. The States asserted the shadow of public authority for local purposes, and the Congress of the Confederation was without means or credit and too feeble to enforce its enactments. The army was in a state of mutiny and destitution. They were, indeed, dark days. For a season despair possessed almost all men. The liberties we had secured we were powerless to maintain and too prostrate to enjoy. Hamilton never despaired. The causes of this distress he had considered and the necessary relief he had brought forward. When he was but twenty-two years old he wrote to Robert Morris, then a delegate in Congress, a letter expounding fully his views on the subject of the finances of

the country, and suggested that a foreign loan was the only means of relief, and in the next year, on the 3d of September, 1780, when he was but twenty-three years old, he laid before Mr. James Duane, a member of Congress from this city, his plan for organizing the Government of this people on a firm and stable foundation.

He had at that early age fathomed the whole subject, and with a force of reason that was his great gift he set forth in clear and well-defined words the public wants of the confederate colonies. It is a profound and searching exposition of the actual state of things, and it gives the ruling features of that plan of union which was afterward adopted and under which we now live. It was the first draft of a great title-deed, conveying supreme popular power to a government created by the people for the public good. I do not use an exaggerated expression when I say that it was an astounding work of knowledge, wisdom, and genius. It is an unexampled document. There is not another like it in the records of this world's history. And by a youth of twenty-three years! The plan of the Constitution which he afterward propounded in the Convention, and of which I shall presently speak, was but an elaboration and more detailed proposal of the same thoughts and ideas.

Impressed, as by a supernatural call, with a sense of the duty that was set before him—his appointed task—his mission—he began the work of construction. With this disintegrated, chaotic condition of bewildered colonies, walking with tottering steps in the pathways of public authority—with this confused and anxious body of unhappy and enfeebled communities he proposed to deal. They were to be the subjects of his intellectual and moral care. He knew what had been before attempted from time to time, with the same material, in the early days of their colonial life. But then they were crawling in their infancy, then they were the subjects of the crown, then they were free from the sorrows of that tribulation which they had passed through and were now bending under. Now we were independent and must take our place among nations. The necessities of the Colonies had in former times united them. In 1643 they had a compact that continued for forty

years, and it was for deliberating on all matters of peace and common concern, and to provide against impending wars—a league offensive and defensive.

After this, in 1754, at the instance of the Mother Country, a Congress was convened to provide for the necessities of the French war, and this Congress proposed a plan of union that was not accepted by the Colonies and was rejected by the crown. In 1765, Massachusetts invited a Congress of the Colonies to digest a Bill of Rights and deny the power of taxation to the British crown, and this was followed by the Congress of 1774, and that by the Confederation of 1778, under which we were living when the ratification of peace was obtained in 1788. With his voice and his pen he labored incessantly to impress upon the people the necessity of establishing a permanent and supreme government as the only means of restoring order and maintaining the independence we had fought for and won.

Here in this State he organized the action of its public authorities to aid in effecting his purpose. He was sent to the Congress of the Confederation, and there with earnest, persisting zeal he labored. Finally, as the fruits of his efforts the States authorized delegates to convene, and they did meet in Philadelphia, on the 14th of May, 1787. This Convention deliberated and sat until the 17th of September of the same year. Of this body he was a member.

The Virginia plan and the plan of Mr. Charles Pinckney of South Carolina, and what was called the Jersey plan presented by Mr. Patterson, were all submitted and discussed. The Virginia plan gave supreme authority in all national matters with a negative on the State laws and with express authority to use the public force against a delinquent State, while the Jersey plan made one single legislature, and among other peculiar and impractical features acknowledged the sovereignty of the States. On the adoption of one of these plans the Convention was much divided. They were both dangerous. The Virginia one, as Hamilton said, was "to enact civil war." The other led to anarchy. The dissolution of the Convention was feared.

Hamilton stood alone, and at this critical moment he presented his own plan. Mr. Madison has said of it that it was

"so prepared that it might have gone into immediate effect if it had been adopted." Read it now, and read it side by side with the Constitution, and we can at once see how near the one is the counterpart of the other. It was changed and modified to meet conflicting opinions and to avoid objections, but as an entire paper the resemblance remains. It is a marvelous production of intellect and wisdom. No such thing was ever done before. No such plan of nationality was ever projected by the reason or wit of man. That it could have thus been done passed human understanding. It is the best adjusted scheme for composing all differences in dispute and reconciling all points of contention that could have been suggested. The danger that attended the execution of the National powers and the existence of State authority he foresaw and dealt with. The fierce trial through which we have just gone he predicted and provided for. State sovereignty he regarded as the seed of anarchy.

"Tractas et incedis per ignes
Suppositos cineri doloso."

Had public men in authority heeded his warning and repelled that dangerous element, the war that well nigh destroyed us would never have happened. But the value of his wisdom is seen and felt in the power that was retained to assert the national authority and maintain the national life. How finely he expresses the spirit of our Government, which is the spirit of our people, when he said, "We are now forming a republican Government. Real liberty is neither found in despotism nor in the extremes of democracy, but in moderate government." "Those who mean to form a solid republican Government ought to proceed to the confines of another government. As long as offices are open to all men and no constitutional rank is established, it is pure republicanism. But if we incline too much to democracy we shall soon shoot into a monarchy."

This was but the echo of what he had written and published when he was but seventeen years old.

"But a representative democracy, where the right of election is well secured and regulated, and the exercise of the legislative, executive, and judicial authorities is vested in select persons chosen really and not nominally by the people, will in

my opinion be most likely to be happy, regular, and durable." But as to pure democracies, he said, "No position in politics is more false than this. The ancient democracies did not possess one feature of good government. Their very character was tyranny, their figure deformity. The true principle of a republic is that the people should choose whom they please to govern them. Representation is imperfect in proportion as the current of popular favor is checked. This great power of free government, popular election, should be practically pure, and the most unbounded liberty allowed."

These expressions of his thoughts and convictions uttered by him in the debates and discussions in the Convention and elsewhere, I give, that it may be seen how clear and well defined then were his ideas of the use and beauty of popular liberty and popular suffrage to express popular will and maintain public order and secure private rights and enforce public and private duties. They are all plain enough to us now, but then men were startled with them. No such thoughts of organized popular power to produce such stable results for national ends had ever before then been enforced and uttered.

To all but to him they were ideal and theoretical. Now they are real—institutional, practical, common.

Then there were but three millions of people for whom the Government was provided, but he pointed out that it was prepared for an empire of millions. He said, "We have now three millions of people; in twenty-five years we shall have six; in forty years nine millions." And now we have over forty millions, and at the same ratio of increase, at the close of this century it will be a hundred millions, and by the year 1930 it will be swollen to the enormous number of two hundred and forty-six millions, nearly equal to the present population of Europe! When we contemplate this in its almost super-human and unexampled growth we can feel a sense of gratitude and awe for the genius of that one man who thus foresaw the needs of such a people and provided from the chaotic fragments of its early being the form and order of government that made it a nation and prepared the way for its growth and the preservation of its rights and liberties.

His intellectual vision could see the promised land he was not to enter. Thus he prophesied, as if inspired with supernatural power.

The Constitution was adopted, and to that great paper is appended the names of George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and Alexander Hamilton, a conjunction of human greatness, of human wisdom, and human genius never before so united. Then began his real labor. With his pen, with his speech, and with his personal influence in the New York Convention and elsewhere he was tireless. In the *Federalist*, written mainly by him, aided in part by Mr. Madison and Mr. Jay, he expounded those doctrines that were to secure the adoption of the Constitution. For all time those papers will remain as the just and true exposition of its purpose and fitness for its end. Other papers he prepared and issued, and all to effect the same result.

From his pen flowed limpid streams of pure thought and demonstration on those high themes of public right and private duty that has never been surpassed and which he submitted to the reason and the moral sense of the nation. When Congress first assembled it enacted and proposed for the ratification of the States the first ten amendments to the Constitution. All but one of them were contained in the declaration and amendments before offered by Hamilton in the Convention of New York.

President Washington was inaugurated, and Mr. Hamilton was chosen by him to occupy the post of danger and difficulty—the Treasury. All other positions as compared with it then were mere formalities of state.

The first important act was the organization of his department, and to this day the order and discipline he established stands untouched, and is admitted to be perfect and complete for all the purpose of its vast and intricate necessities. The adjustment of the finances of the nation was the great task that he was to execute. The war had left the country deluged with valueless paper and weighed down with debt. The Confederation and the States were alike crippled with what were then debts of vast amount. To the cry of the dishonest he would not listen. He proclaimed that the public debt was the

price of our liberty, and it must be accounted for. Public honor and private morals alike demanded its payment. Furthermore, he advocated the assumption by the nation of the State debts incurred in the prosecution of the war, and after angry and fierce resistance he sustained himself and prevailed, and his measures were all adopted. He always prevailed, for he appealed to the conscience and moral sense of the people to scorn dishonor and uphold justice. His plans were prosperous, and soon the credit of the whole country rose; confidence was established, tranquillity existed in every avenue of public and private affairs.

His reports to Congress were numerous and frequent. They were submitted to stern and searching legislative and popular criticism. They are now, and they will be to the end of our national life, and far beyond it, memorials of the marvelous knowledge, wisdom, and thought of this wonderful man. What they maintained and propounded became the fundamental law of the land, and through them we secured, and, as long as they are observed, will retain the vigorous national life we now enjoy. All concerns of the public administration were treated of by him. The mint, the currency, public debt, public credit, public loans, and the foundation of national banks, foreign and internal commerce, the laws of navigation, foreign and internal taxes and duties, public highways, internal improvements, the American system of protection for domestic industry, the public lands, the organization of the army and navy, the foundation of a military school at West Point, the extinction of foreign title to and authority over dominions within our natural territorial limits, the disposition of the Indian tribes, the rights of belligerents and neutrals, the rights and duties of States and their citizens, the establishment of the national judicial authority, and the reorganization of it as the sole arbiter in disputed questions of constitutional construction, which he pronounced to be, what it has been and is, the citadel of public justice and public purity; the liberation of the slaves, the naturalization of foreigners—all of these were the subject of his thoughtful consideration.

Sovereignty he believed and taught was of necessity vested in the United States as the supreme authority of the nation.

To the States he conceded rights that were to be held inviolate and inviolable. Local authority must be maintained to establish and preserve local order, local protection, and local relief. That was needed for the peace of society and to secure the possession and enjoyment of private property and personal individual rights, and in a vast territory like ours, as it then was, with a scattered population and with imperfect means of intercourse, it is also essential, as a political element, to excite and keep alive a public feeling, and to interest men in the support of all government, general and local, and to check the undue exercise or action of national authority through unreasonable and irresponsible agents. State sovereignty he saw and said would lead to anarchy, and that he resisted. The object of government was unity of power in one supreme head for the sake of peace, for the sake of order, for the sake of law, for the general common good, and for the preservation of personal liberty.

I shall not even allude to the parties that were then created, or the men who led those parties. I shall not speak of those contentions. The motives and purposes and actions of other men toward him or his opinions of or acts toward them I shall hold beneath the dignity of this occasion. All of that I shall dismiss and pass by. I must speak of him and treat him as he would have me do if I were now to speak in his great presence—conflicting with the fame of no one, not arraigning the opinions or acts or motives of any man. We are in a purer, higher atmosphere of thought and reflection. I am here to recount the grand things that he did, and to remind you of the great debt we all owe to him. I shall not compare him with any one. The plane of his nature was distinct and apart from that of those around him, “for one star differeth from another star in glory.”

While he was at the head of the Treasury intricate questions of foreign policy arose which were submitted to his consideration. The treaty with Great Britain was the occasion of much public excitement. It concerned our foreign commerce, our internal affairs, and the final adjustment of all outstanding questions of dispute between us and the Mother Country. In settling this his advice guided the Administration.

At the same time our relations with France was a subject of serious importance. The world was shocked and startled with the great Revolution. The public men who rose on the ruins of that ancient monarchy would have forced us into an offensive and defensive alliance with them. The popular sentiment here sympathized with the people of France, and our sense of gratitude for the aid that Frenchmen had given us, prompted a public wish to be united with them. But against this heat and frenzy Hamilton opposed his judgment, and so shaped the course of the Administration that we were not entangled with those contentions that soon made a continent one great camp, and all of Christian Europe a battle-field.

"Storms and darkness, under cover of which innocent blood was shed like water, fields were fought, frenzies of hatred gathered among nations, such as cried to heaven for help and for retribution." This he foretold, and this, too, he avoided.

But I am admonished by the multitude of events that he ruled, and which I must relate if I continue thus, and so I must pause. He had frequently resolved to retire. The growth of his family and his diminished means warned him. The object he had in accepting the Treasury was attained. The methods he had proposed had been accepted and were prospering. The relief he had promised had been secured, and his end was answered; besides, all the contentions of public life were odious to him. By the persuasion of Washington he had remained, but in 1795 he surrendered his seat in the Cabinet, and retired to follow his profession and to enjoy the tranquillity and happiness of his home. Now, let me read to you what Washington at this time wrote to him:—

"PHILADELPHIA, February 2d, 1795.

"DEAR SIR: After so long an experience of your public services, I am naturally led, at this moment of your departure from office (which it has always been my wish to prevent), to review them.

"*In every relation which you have borne to me, I have found that my confidence in your talents, exertions, and integrity has been well placcd.*

"I the more freely render this testimony of my approbation, because I speak from opportunities of information which *can not deceive me*, and which furnish satisfactory proof of your title to public regard.

"My most earnest wishes for your happiness will attend you in your retirement, and you may assure yourself of the sincere esteem, regard, and friendship of, dear sir,

"Your affectionate,

"GEORGE WASHINGTON."

He resumed the practice of his profession, and in it he prospered. The necessities of his position and his personal associations, combined with his anxiety to see the administration of the Government properly conducted, still obliged him to take part in the selection of candidates for public office. Of this interest he could not divest himself. It was a part of his nature. He was born to lead and think and feel for the public. In those days party feeling was strong, even to personal violence. We do not know of such bitterness. Then it was degenerated into rancor and malice. The institutions he bestowed on us have civilized and humanized men. His opposition to some aspiring men, and his open censure of their ways and purposes and actions as being hurtful to the general public good, and the fact that his opposition was destruction of their hopes, excited a hatred for him that was deep and fierce.

It was resolved that he should be removed. A man of note, but of desperate fortunes and wicked ways of life, sought a quarrel with him, and called him to account on an indefinite charge of having spoken of him words of condemnation. It resulted in a challenge. I do not propose to enlarge on this sorrowful, wretched subject, but I will say that at this day few men would hold themselves responsible thus on such a complaint and so presented. The purpose was to have his life. Then men answered to such calls under an impulse of military honor. We had just emerged from a long war with the habits and principles of the camp infused into our social, personal, and public life. He met this adversary—a man prepared by practice and determination of purpose—who, with cold, merciless deliberation, murdered him.

“That hand shall burn in never-quenching fire
That staggered thus his person.”

The man who did this act turned aside from the scene of his guilt to meet a punishment that few have suffered. He lingered through a prolonged life of bad deeds and meanness, an object of detestation in this community, who looked upon him to the end of his evil days with mingled feelings of contemptuous abhorrence and scorn.

Thus passed away this soldier, this patriot, this orator, this statesman, subtle in knowledge of mankind—this philosopher and perfect citizen. There was nothing vile or mean in his nature. All was heroic and noble. His intellect was clear and high, his understanding sound, his heart pure, his will imperial and commanding. “*Justum et tenacem propositi.*”

⁴ I must not omit to make mention of one other conspicuous feature of his character. He was not inflamed with that sense of self-sufficient conceit which scoffs at faith and glories in unbelief. With all of his triumphant genius and splendor and force of intellect he believed with humility, and bowed with submissive awe. He had read and learned that “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night.”

He did not “sit in the seat of the scornful.”

There, then, behold this presentment of him. Reverence him; obey his precepts, and glory in the result of his grand labors, and be equal to the duties of that great citizenship of this mighty nation, which he of all men was the first to secure for you. His fame can not pass away. It will last forever. It will be as plain and enduring to all mankind hereafter as if it were written on the face of heaven and every letter were a star.

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